

Swaffham Prior Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections 'From our Old Files' published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbook' of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

1897 07 13

The villages of Swaffham Prior and Swaffham Bulbeck were the scene of an interesting ceremony when the marriage of Miss Isabella Maude Allix of Swaffham Prior House and Captain Edward Young of the Royal Engineers took place. The church was filled to overflowing and the aisle was lined with eight non-commissioned officers all of whom, to judge by the array of medals on their breasts, were accustomed to perform a services somewhat more arduous and less ornamental than on this occasion. The bride wore a dress of rich ivory satin with chiffon sleeves trimmed with old Limerick lace and sprays of myrtle and

orange blossom. After signing the register the bride and bridegroom were met at the vestry by three little boys carrying baskets of flowers and the little fellows walking backwards in true court style strewn the bride's path to her carriage. After the ceremony the bridal party returned to Swaffham Prior House, passing under a triumphal arch which had been erected over the lodge gate.

1898 07 27

Newmarket rural council was told that the water supply of Swaffham Prior was derived from springs, and was abundant and naturally pure. All that was necessary was to see that it was properly safeguarded. Some of the existing wells were so circumstanced that they ran the risk of contamination. Four bored wells would be sufficient for the village and one more for the hamlet of Reach. Only one outbreak of diphtheria had occurred in the village, in 1894, when four cases occurred in one house, but analysis of the water supply showed that it was pure and fit for drinking purposes

1900 01 14 c

In February of last year the hospitality of the columns of the C.D.N. was extended to Mr Clark of Swaffham Prior by the publication of a letter with reference to his difference with the vicar. It was strongly worded and calculated to provoke a vigorous rejoinder. When a reply was received it was inserted. The contents annoyed him so much that he instructed a London solicitor to write asking for the name of the anonymous 'Lover of truth' to be given up to him. When informed this could not for one moment be considered he elected to proceed with an action of libel against the newspaper. It is one of the traditions of British journalism that the confidence reposed in a newspaper by those who write and desire that their names should not be made known is sacred. It is a matter of satisfaction that a jury has exonerated us from blame and that our fairness and judgement has been vindicated

1900 04 14

It is exactly 37 years ago that the Baptists of Swaffham Prior became possessed of a building in which to hold their services. Mr George Apthorpe recalled how in 1859 some one approached him to ask whether he would go to Swaffham. He readily assented but found some difficulty in finding one who would open his house for the conduct of a Nonconformist service in that stronghold of ecclesiasticism. Accordingly he went to the late Mr Frederick Palmby who granted the use of his barn. Soon the services were attended by some 500 people.

1900 05 10

Messrs Gain, Moyes & Wisbey offered for sale by auction two acres of land at Wicken fen described as the only virgin fenland in England. It was valuable in consequence of the rare insects and birds and should receive the attention of any ornithologist or naturalist. The bidding reached £17.10s. at which price Mr George Verrall, president of the Entomological Society became its owner. The next lot, a similar piece in St Edmund's Fen was purchased for the Hon. Nathaniel Rothschild. The freehold licensed premises, the White Hart beerhouse, situate on heath Road, Swaffham Prior was withdrawn.

1900 08 20

The Star Brewery Company applied for a licence to sell intoxicating liquors at a house about to be constructed near the railway station, Swaffham Prior. It would be a substantial house consisting of a bar, smoke room, parlour and other conveniences with two bedrooms which could be converted into a club room. They would erect a bridge across the watercourse for horses and carts and two footbridges. It would be used by persons shooting in the neighbourhood. The licence of the Cow and Calf in the village would be given up because Mr Allix did not want two licences in the village.

1901 11 06

Newmarket RDC was told that every year £120 was collected from Swaffham Prior Fen and it was time something was done to alleviate the 100 inhabitants. Corn had to be carted by the river as a result of the bad state of the roads, which were in the worse condition possible – both summer and winter. Certain roads which have been metalled by the Fen Reeves should be taken over and maintained by the District Council.

1901 11 21

Mr Benstead of Swaffham Prior asked Newmarket RDC to take over parts of the road which have been metalled by the Fen Reeves. Some councillors spoke in opposition. Mr Tebbitt said there was pretty much 100 miles of such roads in Soham and he would move that Soham Fen roads be served likewise. Mr Munsey said he would do the same as regards Fordham. It was decided to refer the matter to a committee to thoroughly consider and report.

1902 05 21

Swaffham Prior is unique in that it possesses two churches in one churchyard. St Mary's was formerly a picturesque ruin, the restoration of which began in 1878 when the chancel and vestry were rebuilt. The next process in the work included the restoration of the whole body of the church and both aisles. They are practically finished at the present time, the walls and roof having been completed. The work remaining to be done includes the flooring and glazing of the windows. It once possessed a steeple but now only a portion of the tower remains, dilapidated in condition.

1902 10 23

St Mary's church, Swaffham Prior, having been for years the ruinous companion in the same churchyard, of the parish church of St Cyriac is now open once more for public worship. The work of restoration had been proceeding for a considerable time. It is now probably one of the most unique looking sacred buildings in all England. The old and new parts form a bizarre combination. Above a new roof are the remains of what has been a magnificent Norman tower. About half of it is left and is still extremely picturesque. Before a large congregation the Bishop conducted the re-opening service after which St Cyriac's ceased to be, and St Mary's became the parish church.

1903 02 03

Steps are to be taken all over England to reduce the number of licensed houses, Bottisham magistrates were told. They have one licensed house to every 123 people. The Cow and Calf beerhouse, Swaffham Prior has not applied for a license, as one has been granted to a new house near the railway station & The Harrow, Fulbourn, has been closed. In the last year the landlady of the Crown and Thistle, Fulbourn has been convicted of supplying beer to a drunken person.

1904 02 15

An enquiry at Swaffham Prior into the repair of fen droves heard evidence from elderly residents that they were used by the public before the Highways Act of 1835. C.P. Allix said he remembered the droves for 50 years. All kinds of vehicles had been driven over the roads, with the exception of a motor car. But Newmarket R.D.C. said they were specified as private roads in the parish award of 1814 and had never been repaired by the ratepayers at large. There was nothing to show they had ever been used as public highways.

1904 03

The report of an enquiry into the repair of the fen droves at Swaffham Prior heard that the alleged public highway measured a little over four miles and formed a thoroughfare from near the village railway station to a ferry over the Cam in a hamlet called Swaffham Prior Fen, which has a post office, small chapel and population of 100 persons. The roads were set out as private byways by the Enclosure Award and had not been formally adopted as public

highways so the question was whether between 1814 & 1835 there was uninterrupted use by the public. They took evidence from various witnesses and the RDC claimed they were repairable by drainage commissioners under an Act of 1853. They concluded there was no evidence to show the roads should be repaired by the inhabitants at large and recommended no action be taken by the County Council.

1905 02 04

A disastrous fire broke out at Mr H. Kent's farm, Swaffham Prior; of the thirteen stacks which stood in the farmyard not a vestige remains, except a small heap of ashes. It originated in a corner of the horse yard; Mr King immediately liberated all the animals which were then left to their own devices. Four had strayed as far as five miles away before a search party discovered them. About a hundred fowls that became panic-stricken dashed into the burning stacks in their fright, and were consumed. The only water available was from a small horse-pond and a well from which it had to first be drawn and then conveyed in buckets to the fire engine before being pumped on to the burning stacks. 05 02 04b

1905 03 17

A CDN reporter had occasion to send a telegraph message from the Swaffham Prior post office to this paper; he then began to return to Cambridge by cycle. After a leisurely ride he found had beaten the wire. This was an annoyance, bearing in mind the reputed speed of electricity. It appears the message had first to be despatched to Ely where it had to wait before being transmitted to London, from which it was retransmitted to Cambridge. It arrived one-and-a-half hours after being sent! 05 03 17

1905 11 04

Justices awarded compensation under the scheme for reducing the number of public houses. They included the Hoops pubs in Kneesworth, Melbourn and Steeple Morden, the Sir Harry Smith at Swavesey and the Ram's Head at Swaffham Bulbeck. In Oakington The Windmill, King's Head and Plough and Harrow were closed. But the closure of the 'Wait for the Bus' at Bottisham was contested; others Rams Head, Swaffham Bulbeck; Swaffham Prior: White Hart; Swavesey: Railroad, Bird in Hand; Cottenham: Windmill; Dry Drayton: Rose and Crown 05 11 04b-d

1906 02 13

The Anchor, Swaffham Prior, had been closed since October on account of the tenant absconding. Since then it had been let to a man, whom the Star Brewery found had been convicted a few years back, and they did not propose to bring him forward as tenant. Magistrates asked whether it was worth while re-opening the house. The firm thinks it is; it is more for the convenience of anglers and boating people during the summer. The licence was renewed to the old tenant. 06 02 13b

Licences – John Bull, Swaffham Prior; Plough, Bottisham; Hopbine, Cherry Hinton – 06 02 13c

1906 03 10

The John Bull beer house, Swaffham Prior, contained two public rooms and stabling for four horses, it was 34 yards from the Red Lion, a full-license house. Mr Bulman had held the licence since 1898. Lacons had purchased it in 1901 The trade was over two barrels a week as well as ginger wine, which was very good for a beer house, there had been no complaints and it was well-conducted. The licence was renewed. 06 03 10

1906 10 03

The 'Nunc Dimittis' window to the memory of Mrs Wilkinson has been removed from St Cyriac's church, Swaffham Prior and is now in London, being adapted for the two-light west window of the south aisle of St Mary's church in that parish. The 12 small pieces of stained

glass, some representing angels, and some with sacred monograms, have also been taken down for eventual use in one of the other windows. 06 10 03

1907 02 12

Licencing sessions – Bottisham, Pike & Eel Fen Ditton, Swaffham Prior – Anchor & Red Lion, Guilden Morden – Six Bells – 07 02 12a & b

1907 06 29

The Milkmaid was one of 13 licenced houses in Willingham and they could do away with half of them, magistrates were told. But there were 100 acres of market gardens all round where a great many men and girls were constantly employed and some came to the house for lunch. The trade had increased since the King William was closed and now did over a barrel a week

Also: Marquis of Granby, Woodman's Arms, Claremont, Golden Fleece; Swaffham Prior Anchor, Harston Green Man, Lt Shelford Three Horseshoes, Over Duke of Cumberland, Willingham Milkmaid - details, Isleham Bell, Fen Ditton Pike & Eel. Bassingbourn Tally Ho, 07 06 29 & a

1908 02 15

Swaffham Prior had nine licenced houses, six full and three beer 'on' for a population of 950. The John Bull was in a dilapidated condition, it was next door to the Red Lion which had stables for four horses and had been put into a thorough state of repair. Bottisham have seven pubs; the Rose and Crown was in bad repair but the Swan had six bedrooms and a bakehouse. Cow and Hare, Rock Hotel, Fen Ditton; Blue Lion, Fulbourn: Royal Oak, Bottisham: Rose and Crown, Swaffham Prior: John Bull, Reach: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Lt Wilbraham: Hole in the Wall 08 02 15 & a & b

1908 07 31

Twenty-six licensed houses are to close, magistrates decided. They include the Robin Hood at Litlington, Chesterton Long Reach,, Swaffham Prior's Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Three Jolly Watermen in Waterbeach Fen. CWN 08 07 31

1908 09 19

Three financial failures connected with agriculture came before Cambridge bankruptcy court. A Swaffham Prior farmer had borrowed from moneylenders who he hoped to pay off with a good harvest. But even after the best harvest for years he was still in debt. He lived in a large house so his wife had to have a maid because she could not do all the work herself. He'd also spent a great deal on whisky and a fur collar for his wife. CWN 08 09 19 p7

1909 02 12

Licensing objections to Bottisham Rose and Crown, Swaffham Prior John Bull and Uncle Tom's Cabin at Reach – 09 02 12

1909 06 25

At the anniversary of Swaffham Prior Zion Union Chapel a handsome brass tablet was unveiled in memory of T.T. Ball, S. Chivers, G. Apthorpe and William Benstead. It was through the labours of the first three that the chapel was erected in 1862. Prior to that services were held in a barn. Mr Benstead was Sunday School superintendent for 45 years. A long programme of recitations was given by the children 09 06 25

1911 04 28

Considerable damage was caused to the pumping engine which supplies water to the reservoir on Mr C.P. Allix's Swaffham House estate. One of the feed pipes to the oil engine broke and in an instant two gallons of oil burst into flame. Swaffham Prior fire engine was brought up as quickly as possible but the fire spread with great rapidity and the shed became a total wreck. The engine has suffered extensive damage and will not be in working order again for some time 11 04 28d

1912 05 03

Three labourers were summonsed for being drunk and disorderly in the Cherry Tree Inn, Swaffham Prior Fen. Henry Oakman, the landlord, told the court they'd had a quart of beer and then began speaking about the coal strike, saying it was a good thing for labourers and talking about starting a Labourer's Union. They used bad language so he asked them to leave, then sent for the parish constable. John Howe said they'd refused to go, "The fact of the matter is these men come down to the Fen because it's a little bit quiet and they think they can do as they like", he said. The men were fined. But the mother of two of them said the decision was very cruel. 12 05 03a

1914 08 07

Several young men from Fulbourn, including Reservists and Territorials left to serve their country. Others were seen making their way from Sawston to Whittlesford station, a great crowd assembled at Willingham station to see their men leave. At Swaffham Prior James Fordham, a labourer, was summonsed for leaving his employer without notice. But he was a reservist who had been called up to serve his country and the charge was dropped.

1914 09 11

Territorials – response, Caxton, Foxton, Meldreth, Eltisley, Godmanchester, Swaffham Prior, Whittlesford,

1916 08 16 CIP

Golden Wedding. — Mr. and Mrs. C. P. Allix, of Swaffham Prior House, celebrated their golden wedding on August 2.

1920 01 07

Rats Killed, Up to December 3rd last the number of rats killed in the county and paid for by Cambs County Council under the Rats Order, was 35,516. The districts concerned were: Little Abington (number of rats killed 504), Ashley (980), Balsham (2,718), Borough Green (358), Bottisham (999), Cheveley (631). Chippenham (838), Great Chishill (322), Croxton (225), Dullingham (1,205), Duxford (754), Elsworth (39), Fordham (8,072), Fowlmere (489), Harston (322), Hauxton (186). Heydon (1,593), Hildersham (236). Horseheath (324), Ickleton (1,095), Isleham (3,809), Kennett (1,422). Kirtling (396), Kneesworth (549), Linton (584), Lode (548), Melbourn (442), Newton (160), Pampisford (429), Sawston (332), Shepreth (313). Shudy Camps (1.38), Snailwell (786), Soham (2,896), Stetchworth (1,105) Swaffham Prior (1,032), Thriplow (464), Waterbeach (967), West Wickham (995), Whittlesford (324), Great Wilbraham (846), Wood Ditton (2,017).

1920 02 28

Swaffham Prior church windows painted with war activities

1920 10 27

Diocesan Council. — The annual meeting of the Ely Diocesan Council of Church Music was held at the Lion Hotel, Cambridge, when the Archdeacon of Huntingdon. Mr. Noel Ponsonby, the organist of Ely Cathedral, was appointed conductor, the Rev. I. Fisher, Swaffham Prior Vicarage honorary secretary, and the Archdeacon of Huntingdon, honorary treasurer. A festival of parish choirs of the Ely Diocese is to be held at Ely Cathedral on Tuesday. May

31st, 1921, when the music book will be that issued for 1915 which has not yet been used on account of the war.

1922 01 04

Farm fires at Hiam's Prickwillow, Swaffham Prior, Caldecote – 22 01 04e

1924 05 20

A number of parents from Swaffham Prior and Reach were brought before the Bottisham police court for not sending their children to Burwell school. In order to provide children over eleven years of age with a superior education it was found advisable to reorganise the schools in that area. The county education committee has provided a motor omnibus to convey the children to Burwell. Far from overcoming the objections of the parents this bus seems one of the chief sources of objection. Other parents object on the score of extra expense for packing up their children's dinners

1926 04 01

The annual meeting of Swaffham Prior parish council turned out to be quite a passive affair. Mr R. Cooper said they wanted a school and there would never be any peace and quiet in the village until they got one. The parents who sent their children to Burwell only did so on sufferance. The grouping scheme had been brought about to suit the pockets of the "money-grabbing" ratepayers. They had been "diddled" out of their school and the labouring parties had been put down as if they had no sense.

1927 03 16

Cambridgeshire Education Committee discussed Swaffham Prior Church of England School. The church trustees were prepared to build a new school for junior children and infants, the older children being sent to Burwell. A deputation wanted a Council school, suitable for all classes and ages but it was not their policy to do that sort of thing.

1928 07 16

Thousands of people flocked into the old-world village of East Harling but there was little chance of getting into the court room where men well-known in the racing world were summoned to answer charges relating to cock fighting. They included defendants from Newmarket and Swaffham Prior. A horsebox had been fitted up for the fighting, with a red carpet on the floor and a ring of baize covered boards. Two birds had been prepared, each armed with a pair of artificial spurs. The defence said there was no case to answer. Cock fighting has been one of the oldest English sports and there was a great deal of misconception about the cruelty. But it has been prohibited by law since 1849.

1931 05 08

The soft roads in Burwell and Swaffham Prior are in a very bad state. Much of the land cost £50 an acre 50 years ago but now sold for about £10; landlords had been paying highway rates for 60 years for very little benefit and could not be asked to contribute to repairs. The same applied elsewhere: valuable land had depreciated owing to the difficulty of getting to it in winter. Unemployed men should be employed to make them up. 31 05 08c & d

1934 12 06

The Sanitary Inspector had examined a number of private wells in Swaffham Prior and found the amount of water in some of them was very small and repairs were needed in a variety of cases. It was recommended that in the event of the council not deciding to provide the village with a piped supply of water that two wells be sunk, one near the Cock Inn and one near Station Road. 34 12 06

1935 01 12

Nonagenarian Richard Chapman was born at Swaffham Prior and started work before he was seven, scaring crows and rooks off land for a shilling a week. He never went to a day school but obtained his knowledge from a night school he attended when 18 years of age. He was leader of the choir at Reach Congregational Church in which he used to lay the concert flute before they had an organ. He has been engaged in agricultural work, fossil digging and as a peat master, employing men cutting peat in Swaffham Prior Fen for use as fuel. During the war this peat was also used in homes as a preventative against influenza. 35 01 12c

1935 12 05

At Burwell various houses in Parsonage Lane, Fuller's Lane, Burnt Yard and Beldam Square should be demolished together with six at Malting Cottages, the Medical Officer advised. Four houses at Mutton Row and two in Lower Road Swaffham Prior should also be pulled down. Many unfit houses were still occupied at Swaffham Bulbeck but four at Quarry Lane and two in the High Street should be cleared as soon as there was alternative accommodation for the working-class people who would be displaced. 35 12 05

1936 07 01

A large number of Methodists gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Swaffham Fen Methodist Church. This is one of the outposts of Methodism, being situated about four miles beyond Waterbeach and three from Swaffham Prior. It is only reached with difficulty after travelling down lonely fen roads and crossing the river in an antiquated chain boat. It has been well served over a long period by the stalwart local preachers of the Cottenham circuit. Afterwards a picnic tea was held in the grass roadway near the chapel 36 07 01

1939 02 11

In March 1937 flood waters breached Soham Lode, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. This year the same bank gave way to the enormous pressure of flood water, bringing a further trail of havoc. Natural seepage and pumps have cleared this away but at Swaffham Prior Fen about 1,000 acres are under water caused through seepage from the banks of the Lodes. Pumps have been going day and night but still farms are isolated and cattle have had to be moved. Distress warrants are being issued for drainage rates but farmers won't pay because they haven't any money 39 02 11

1940 07 29

Concrete road to be constructed Swaffham Prior Fen but military had commandeered all cement – 40 07 29a

1941 12 09

Home Guard check motorist identity papers Swaffham Prior – photo – 41 12 09.

1942 02 06

Death of Mr. W. Clarke, — Mr. Wm Clarke passed peacefully away at his residence, The Farm, Swaffham Prior, on January 29, aged 84 years. He had enjoyed health up to only a few days before the end. He leaves two sons, Mr. W. T. Clarke and Mr J.W. Clarke of Swaffham Prior and one daughter, Mrs R.C. Chinery of Bury St. Edmunds. Mr. Clarke had farmed all his life, and before his retirement a few years ago farmed extensively at Swaffham Prior, Burwell and Kirtling. He also carried on a considerable business as a straw merchant, and for over 60 years supplied trainers with this commodity, his early patrons being Matt Dawson, Fred and Charlie Archer, Dick Marsh and a host of others, leading up to the present day. He was a well-known figure in Newmarket, and his fondness for tile town led him to choose it as his resting place, the internment taking place at Newmarket cemetery yesterday (Thursday) afternoon.

1942 06 19

King and Queen Tour Fens, - Their Majesties the King and Queen on Saturday paid a visit to reclaimed fen land in Cambridgeshire, and saw for themselves the magnificent work that is being carried out by the Cambs War Agricultural Executive on the vital food front. Indeed the whole five thousand acres at Swaffham Prior Fen and Adventurers Fen, Burwell is nothing more nor less than a battlefield where men and women, armed with the latest weapons of agriculture, are carrying out relentless warfare against rushes, scrub, bog oaks and flooding. Considerably more than half the 5,000 acres was derelict in 1939; the remainder produced only moderate crops . . . During their visit their Majesties travelled over miles of new concrete roads through Reach to Adventurers Fen, Burwell where they embarked on barges at Cock Up Bridge on Burwell Lode, which runs through artificial banks above the level of the fen. While the barges were sailing down the Lode demonstrations of blasting bog oaks by explosives were given,

1942 06 25

MPs tour fens around Swaffham Prior House, a hostel where 65 members Land Army reside
– 42 06 25d

1943 07 16

"Combined Operation." — Opening a farmers' gift sale at the Cambridge Cattle Market yesterday, in aid of the Cambridgeshire Red Cross and St. John Fund, Lady Mountbatten, wife of the Chief of Combined Operations, said: "This sale, I am sure, is going to be one of the most successful 'combined operations' we have seen." Farmers for miles around gave livestock — ranging from cows to kids — to be sold for auction for the Red Cross and St. John Fund. And hundreds of farmers turned up to buy what was on sale. Not that the auction was confined to animals; far from it. There were also bottles of whisky and champagne, as well as one ton of sulphate of ammonia from Swaffham Prior, to be sold

1945 06 22

Birthday Honours. — The second section of the Birthday Honours List, published on Friday, includes the award of the O.B.E. to the following officials: Mr. J. M. McMillan Executive Officer of the Cambridgeshire W.A.E.C.; Capt. C. O Groom, hon secretary of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Help Society for the Isle of Ely and Cambridge; Mr. McMillan was trained in Edinburgh, where he took a B.Sc. in Agriculture. He came to Cambridge in 1930 as organiser of Agricultural Education for the County Council, and at the beginning of the war was seconded to the W.A.E.C. He has been concerned to a large extent with fenland reclamation and the construction of concrete roads in the fens at Swaffham Prior, Burwell, Isleham, Over and Cottenham. The King and Queen saw some of the work when they visited Swaffham and Burwell in June, 1942. Capt. Groom is a retired Regular Army officer, living, at Wisbech, and takes a keen interest in the ex-Servicemen. He is president of the Workmen's Club and the Institute of Wisbech, and is also a director of Groom Bros. Ltd., who are farmers in the district.

1949 12 09

A further 6,550 acres of Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens is to be referred to the Agricultural Land commission for consideration as to whether it should be taken over by the state. The Agricultural Act empowers the Minister to acquire agricultural land when it's full and efficient use is prevented by work not being carried out efficiently, or because equipment is not being provided or maintained. Opinion in the area is that considerable hardship could be caused should it be decided to recommend state ownership.

1950 01 18

Crowding into the Gardiner Memorial Hall at Burwell, fenland farmers and smallholders decided to form an action committee to fight a Ministry of Agriculture proposal to put 6,550 acres of lands in the Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens into state ownership. The area contains

a good proportion of large blocks of land of 100 acres or more. If the land were purchased it would be at compulsory purchase value, without consideration for potential value

1951 02 02

The Agricultural Land Commission have completed their survey of Swaffham Prior and Burwell fens. They make proposals for improvements and repairs to equipment and for the claying of a substantial acreage of the lighter soils, most of which can be carried out by the owners and occupiers, and say there is no case for compulsory acquisition for the greater part of the land.

1952 12 04

The villagers of Reach want their village to remain a village in its own right. They do not want to become part of Swaffham Prior. Strictly speaking Reach has never been a village in its own right – part of it lying within the parish of Burwell and part in Swaffham Prior, now an Inquiry is trying to sort the matter out. They concede that the present set-up is unsatisfactory but feel the answer is to make Reach a parish of its own.

1954 02 25

The fight by farmers in the Swaffham Prior and Burwell Fens to stop the Government from compulsorily purchasing their land reached a public inquiry. It had been pasture until the Second World War forced the landowners to turn it into arable; much of the land had to be drained and concrete roads added. The Ministry claim the farm buildings were very poor and ought to be rebuilt but it was sheer madness to erected brick buildings because the land would not stand it, being black peat. It was not unknown for vibrations caused by passing lorries to cause buildings partially to collapse.

1954 05 01

Three farmers from Swaffham Prior Fen, who have for five years been living and trying to farm under the threat of Government acquisition of their land have been reprieved. Altogether 588 acres were involved but the Minister of Agriculture has decided only to acquire 312 acres at Hundred Acre Farm, Burwell Fen. The Rev Eric Marsh, formerly Vicar of Over urged the Ministry to speed up such decisions: no man was going to develop his land or improve it if he thought it would be taken from him. Mr Harold Sennitt, whose family has farmed in the district since 1927, had been threatened with the loss of 39 of the 45 acres of root crops he farms, Leonard Folkes five acres and Ernest Garner 90.

1956 03 16

Swaffham Prior old clock 56 03 16a

1957 03 02

Sir - For the past one hundred years Swaffham Prior has had a fountain of pleasing and unusual design. It was circular, built of brick and crowned with a steeply pitched conical roof. Generations used it for the refreshment of men and beasts. Sheep-dogs lapped up water, wayfarers stopped to admire it. But a few days ago, with no warning, it was demolished and the materials carted away. Who is responsible for this vandalism? – Aquarius 57 03 02b

1957 03 15

George Sheldrick was restoring his cottage in Priory Close, Swaffham Prior when he forced a crow bar into a hollow space and discovered a well-preserved ingle nook fireplace. Now after careful removal of old stones the original has been revealed. It has a small salt cupboard and a place for shelves. Carved in an oak door which was once part of the dairy are the initials R.W. with the date 1766, but they've also found a penny dated 1606 and a token from 1609. 57 03 15a & b

1957 03 16

Swaffham Prior Reading Room was filled to capacity for a meeting to discuss the vexed question of the fountain. It was conducted with an element of good-natured chaff, an evening of entertainment as well as inquisition. Not all the remarks were good-humoured. There was plenty of hard-hitting criticism with responsibility for the removal of the landmark laid at the door of Mr Charles Allix, whose father had it built, and Mr Woollard, the chairman of the parish council who carried out the orders for its demolition. 57 03 16

1957 03 29

Swaffham Prior may have lost its fountain but it may gain a new playing field. At last year's annual parish meeting there was an apathetic response with only twelve present – 10 from the parish council. This year there were 100 who went on to talk about the general welfare of the village and formed a committee to find a site. They hope the bricks of the old fountain can be used to build a new one on the ground 57 03 29a & b 57 03 09

1958 11 05

At Swaffham Prior a small dilapidated building standing in a walled enclosure is the old village pound and lock-up where strayed cattle were confined and disturbers of the peace detained to cool their heels and sober up. Not many similar relics remain and this one is unique because for 150 years it served as prison, pound and fire station. The fire engine, presented in 1791, still kept in the building, is capable of pumping a jet of water through its leathern hose. 58 11 05b

1959 01 05

Edwin Muir CBE, the poet and critic of Priory Cottage, Swaffham Prior has died. Born on Orkney, he became Professor of Poetry at Harvard and received honorary doctorates at Prague, Edinburgh and Cambridge. He was literary critic of The Observer and published his autobiography 'The story and the Fable'. Muir retired to Swaffham Prior in 1956 and is to be buried in the churchyard. 59 01 05

1959 02 04

The remote Methodist Chapel in Swaffham Prior fen was built in July 1884. It has a pleasant interior with room for a congregation of about 70. Heating is by a small stove and it still retains the shiny brass paraffin lamps which have provided lighting since the chapel was built. But it is weather-worn and the average attendance is half-a-dozen worshippers. There used to be a small chain boat which enabled people to attend from the Waterbeach side of the river; this has since disappeared. It was nearly sold in 1953 but people in Stretham organised services and the chapel remained open. Now two families are opposing its sale 59 02 04a

1962 05 14

Some 28 miles of concrete fen roads around Isleham, Soham, Willingham and Swaffham Prior are to be taken over by the County Council over a period of up to three years. Cambridgeshire Farmers Union had requested they should be adopted and maintained at public expense. The Internal Drainage Boards had agreed to finance the cost of bringing them up to satisfactory standard 62 05 14

1964 01 13

Agricultural production is increasing but the number of land workers is going down. Farm workers were now more like the skilled technicians of the factory and a £10 national minimum wage was not realistic – it should rise to £12, Swaffham Prior agricultural workers unionists say. And toxic chemicals were still a problem – they should only be used under a licence. Ben Brand of Elsworth was presented with a cheque on behalf of the Union in settlement of a claim arising from an accident at work when wheat slid off a stack, knocked him down and covered him. He was off work for 34 weeks. 64 01 13

1964 12 14

Swaffham Prior villagers are up in arms over the selection by the stonemason of 'models' for gargoyles on the church. But they are caricatures, not memorials and choice is entirely that of the architect and carver. They feature John Shuffleton the mason, Cecil Bourne the architect, John Norris the restoration fund treasurer, former vicar Red Tom Fisher, works foreman Mr Ward and James Sheldrick, an 82-year-old gardener. 64 12 14a

1969 08 07

Swaffham Prior old fire engine restored – 69 08 07

1972 09 22

The church clock has stood for far too long at ten to three, and Grantchester has deteriorated with time. Its inhabitants seem to be living still on past glories and cannot see that their world-renowned village is but a shadow of what it was. Or to put it in the words of Mr Reginald Lambeth and Mr Vernon Cross "The whole village can only be described as scruffy". Messrs Lambeth and Cross came to their conclusion one summer day in June. They had been charged with the task, unpaid, of picking out Cambridgeshire's best kept village. Swaffham Prior won the contest and Mr Lambeth and Mr Cross eliminated Grantchester in the second round. They were "shocked by the low standards of "property maintenance" although they mentioned notable exceptions such as the White Cottage. The decrepit state of things, they say, cannot be blamed on the roadman, who has to look after three villages, nor on the traffic. Bitterly they conclude; "People who are proud of their association of Rupert Brooke should at least keep to his standards"

1974 05 22

One of Swaffham Prior's last two remaining pubs is to close. The Allix Arms, a small pub has been run by one well-known village family for 44 years. Mr Arthur Bye, the present licensee, was handed his notice from Tollemache Cobbold breweries. The pub occupies two rooms of the house where he lives. He uses the pub yard for his coal business. "I am the last tradesman left here. This village is becoming a dying duck, but if I can't find another yard, my coal business will have to close too", he said

1976 03 26

The bells can ring out from St Cyriac's in Swaffham Prior once again – but they will call the villagers to worship in the neighbouring church of St Mary whose tower was not strong enough to take the strain of the bells. Now the sound of St Cyriac's bells mark the end of extensive restoration by the Redundant Churches Trust & the villagers can make suggestions on the future use of the building. Similar churches have been used as concert halls, folk museums or wedding reception halls. St Cyriac's was last used for services in 1902,

1977 01 19

Reach mothers are uniting to press for the rebuilding of a bridge which they say is a potential death trap. It spans the disused railway line on the only main road into Reach from Swaffham Prior. Twenty feet below the bridge are the remains of the parapets, demolished by hooligans, brick by brick, over the last two years. A water main had burst on the surface of the bridge, which has subsided. The Assistant County Surveyor agreed the ideal solution would be to demolish the bridge and level the road, but they were unable to make funds available at the moment. The council is still in the process of taking the bridge over from the Railways Board.

1977 09 22

A group of parents at Swaffham Prior primary school fought and won a battle to save a full time teaching job at the school. The village school with 80 children on its roll now has four full-time teaching staff. Now they want other parents to join them in a campaign to prevent any reduction in the present teacher-pupil ratio of 24 pupils to one teacher in most primary schools. Secondary schools average 16.5 to one

1982 09 02

The Fenland Country Fair held at Swaffham Prior for the first time was so successful that it may become an annual event. It was the brainchild of Malcolm Hall and raised £2,000 to help pay for the building of a new youth centre. About 3,000 people watched lurcher racing, 120 local crackshots took part in a clayshoot, there was a sheep shearing demonstration and 50 ferrets ran in and out of drainpipes in a special tent. 82 09 02

1984 01 12

An unemployed teenager pocked thousands of pounds from church offertory boxes after 400 raids on churches. On one occasion he sat in St Edward's church, Cambridge and watched an old woman put an envelope containing £70 into a church box then fished it out for himself. Amongst his targets were the Round Church – 52 thefts, Little St Mary's (46). Burwell church (42) and Swaffham Prior (26). He was finally caught after the Vicar of Oakington heard him inside the church opening drawers. He was sent to a detention centre for four months 84 01 12 p16

1984 07 05

Swaffham Prior school has come up with a novel way of keeping its kitchens open. They hope to start a weekly lunch club with pensioners taking their meal alongside the children. There are a lot of pensioners who live on their own and don't see anyone from one day to a next – perhaps they could become adopted grannies, said school secretary, Barbara Marshall 84 07 05

1985 04 13

The Barn at Swaffham Prior is at present a shell of clunch stone. But soon it may be converted into a home. If plans are passed most of the ground floor area will be taken up by the kitchen and dining area, there will be inglenook fireplaces on both floors with an extension almost as big as the barn itself giving good views over the countryside. The clunch exterior will be preserved, the roof raised and old tiles replaced. Working out the probable cost is the main headache. 85 04 13

1985 07 02

Thirty former Land Army girls travelled from all parts of the country for a unique get-together at Swaffham Prior House where they stayed during the Second World War. Joan Thomas remembered her attic room in the early 17th-century house while Betty Canham of Wicken recalled getting up at six in the morning. The reunion was sparked by a list of Land Army rules which were pasted to one of the attic rooms and discovered by the Marshall family when they moved there two years ago. The organiser Joan Bradley said she was overwhelmed to see everybody after all that time. 85 07 02a

1987 01 12

It was pitch dark at 3am one Sunday morning as a Newmarket lorry driver was making his way north of Littleport towards Welney. He was talking to his wife on CD radio when suddenly a bright green light appeared in the sky. It was heading down to earth at tremendous speed, then changed direction and zipped across the road before disappearing. His experiences follow that of two Burwell women who saw huge orange lights above the fields near Swaffham Prior. These are the first unidentified flying objects reported locally for six years. 87 01 12

1989 03 17

The Royal Oak pub at Swaffham Prior, under threat of closure after 200 years, has won a last-minute reprieve from the brewery. Two hundred of the locals submitted a petition urging it be kept open. Known as "Blind Bobs" after landlord, Bob Scutton, it is one of the area's most famous watering holes. But Bob is retiring and Greene King wanted to transfer the licence to

the Black Horse. However this has been sold to a private buyer. Now it will remain for another six months at least. 89 03 17a. closure delayed – 89 03 20

1989 08 05

The old blacksmith's forge at Swaffham Prior was last used 10 years ago. The irons still lie on the fire whilst other tools and original equipment are scattered nearby. Now it may be converted into a studio or apartment. It is for sale with a two-bedroom cottage dating to 1735 which has an inglenook fireplace. It has been rebuilt with unique touches: an old door covered in children's graffiti dated 1778 is now used as a meter cupboard. 89 08 05a, b

1990 07 03

Swaffham Prior windmill gets new aluminium cap – 90 07 03a

1990 08 24

Swaffham Prior named best kept village – 90 08 24b

